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Research Article

Comparison of the Perfection of Generosity in Buddhist and Islamic Mysticism

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ABSTRACT

One of the common features of the different religions is their stress on the altruistic virtues. Generosity is one of the common virtues among religions. There are noticeable similarities between Buddhist and Islamic mysticism regarding generosity. In Buddhist mysticism, especially in Mahayana path, generosity is the first of the sets of perfections that must be acquired in first stage of spiritual discipleship. In Islamic mysticism, it is concerned as status of discipleship and includes various topics. There are different levels of generosity matching with the levels of disciples in both Buddhist and Islamic mystical domains.

Keywords: Generosity, Perfection, Buddhism, Islam.

INTRODUCTION

The world people have been seeing fights, violence, and sanctions against humanity. One of the most fundamental roots of this violence is individual, national, and racial jobbery, egoisms, and supremacies. More dreadful fact is that some of these fights and violence are shaped and continued with religious slogans. However morality is the common point of all religions. Case and comparative studying of moral doctrines will indicate that the doctrines of religions emphasize the peace for every one or not? Generosity doctrine is one of the main human doctrines and common moral concepts of religions. It seems that comparative studying of this doctrine among religions is a step in order to encourage public opinion at the first level in order to accepting other people and decreasing violence and at the upper level in order to helping other people and fellows regardless of nationality, race, and religion. Mystical view in different religions has extraordinary capacity of helping other people. Between mysticism of two great religions, Buddhism and Islam, despite of widespread cultural borders, there are little comparative researches and studies. So the present research intends to have a study in this matter.

Theoretical Background:

In Buddhist mysticism, doctrine of perfections is always significant and generosity perfection is the first perfection which the disciple must achieve in the way of mystical discipleship. In Islamic mysticism perfections and virtues proposed in the form of stages and statuses. In Islam generosity comes in the form of obligatory duties and the recommended acts and also in the form of stages and statuses. Clarifying different angles of the matter in both mystical domains will indicate firstly the value of generosity in each of these two mystical domains, and secondly the similarities and differences of the concept generosity in both mystical domains. To this aim at first the key words will be defined then generosity doctrine will be surveyed in Buddhist and Islamic mysticism.

Definitions:

Generosity:

Generosity means giving property or corporeal and spiritual possession without any expectation. In Buddhism the term Danna (Skt. Dāna; Pal. Danna) and in Islam various terms such as khoms, zakaat, sadagah, enfag, joud, sakha, and easar indicate the concept of generosity.

Perfection:

The human transcendental characters recalled perfections or virtues. This concept in Islamic mysticism is a general concept which includes all of the good characters. In Buddhism perfection with the Sanskrit term *pāramitā* (Pal.; Pal. *pāramitā* or *orpāramī*) beside of general application it has specific application that includes limited features in six or ten sets of perfections.

Buddhism:

The Buddhism is one of the great religions of the world that was based by Siddhārtha Gautama Śākyamuni. Central Asia and Far East is the spiritual territory of Buddhism.

Islam:

Islam is one of the greatest religions of the world, and one of Abrahamic religions. It was founded by the last prophet, Mohammad (Peace be upon him) the son of Abdollah, in Arabia land and now from south east of Asia to west of Africa is its territory.

Generosity Perfection in Buddhist Mysticism:

The Sanskrit word “*pāramitā*” is equivalent to perfection [11]. When a job well done Indian people say it is got “*pāramitā*”, like English people that say “it was finished”. But *Pāramitā* is meaning much more than “finishing” and it means perfect doing of something. [13] Consequently *pāramitā* means the values which a disciple must do them perfectly. [11] The first of Buddhist discipleship perfection sets is generosity perfection.

The Sanskrit term *dāna* (Pal. *danna*) which is translated to generosity in this article, means almsgiving, bounty, and offering. [23] One of the definitions of generosity is nonattached offering [21] with nonattached mind [31]. It is said that: “generosity perfection means achieving other side of the beach with the act of generosity.” [9] This perfection is the first step of perfections and in practice, the most attention has been paid to it and can be found in various Buddhist scriptures [30,9,8].

A spiritual disciple (*bodhisattva*) who enters to the first stage of life namely the stage of joy (Skt. *bhūmipramuditā* or *pramuditā-bhūmi*) beside of having all the perfections and spiritual statuses and not neglecting any perfection, must show the generosity perfection prominently [29]. Now the question is that “How does the disciple realize the generosity perfection?” [9]. Generosity perfection of the disciples is in this fact that they compassionately leading to donate to other creatures since have the same root with them in goodness. (The Ten Stages, 756) There are wide range of properties and services among the things that the disciple gives. According to *Daśabhūmika Sūtra* (cf. The Ten Stages) and the birth stories of Buddha [32]. When a disciple helps any way to others such as teaching, or giving

properties, food, clothing, kingdom, spouse, body parts like head, hands, feet, flesh, and blood, his life, and his merits, gives them without any grief [29,31]. In Buddha’s view granting of anything such as giving of all existence is like giving water from a bowl that you know it will be filled again. He was saying that if the creatures know like him the immediate benefits and ultimate reward of almsgiving, offering, and bestowing, they never ate their food without sharing with others even if it be their last morsel [24].

In one of the birth stories of Buddha, it comes that Buddha in his former lives was born in the guise of Vishvantara prince. At birth he had talked extraordinarily and had said that “I will donate. What can I present?” when he was eight year old he had said that he is ready to present his heart and body to everyone. In adulthood he was ridding the white elephant of the court and was giving alms along the way. One day as a request of one of countries’ envoy presented the white elephant and was exiled because of that. He granted his horse, chariot, and even his children. One day the king of gods appeared to him in the guise of a poor priest and requested his spouse and Buddha accepted. Then the king of gods appeared in his original shape and commended the prince along with the people of Heaven and earth [24].

Buddha described the generosity perfection in this way that: “in this stage The disciple’s thoughts connected to knowledge and gives presents to all without any difference including external and internal granting with the aim of offering to the domain of transcendental illumination and through it leads others to illumination too. Yet there is no perception of things in his existence”. [8]

Subuti, the student of Buddha, divided the generosity perfection to worldly and supernatural. The worldly perfection is that the disciple grants freely to everyone who want something from him and at all times deals with real issues. In achieving worldly generosity perfection, the disciple grants things to all without any expectation and he presents it for transcendental illumination that may as a result of it all the creatures in their lives be calm and maybe one day attain to *nirvāṇa*. This is the worldly perfection of generosity. At this level the disciple is aware of himself as a giving person, and also aware of the person granted to, the act of giving, and the things presented. So there is another level above this one. [8,31]

According to Subuti the other level is supernatural generosity perfection in which although all the mentioned actions done in first level but includes multiple purity. “At the time of donating, our mind should be empty of three things consist of giving action, doer of giving action, and the granted person. If you be able to continue this knowledge, your generosity will extend to all gaps and will influence to domain of Truth [9,8].

In terms of the object of perfect donating, generosity can be giving of property, teachings, merits, and love. In mind of ordinary people the meaning of property giving is giving of corporeal needs such as time, strength, food, clothing, housing, and something like them. For The disciples these are the means of giving not the giving itself. They can even give their flesh and blood. The important point for them is the certain decision for donating freely without any mental barriers. Even if they have nothing for giving, they have generosity perfection like mystic Milarepa who did not have suitable cloth, and lived in thorny place but he acted generosity perfection because generosity is internal form and intention not the property itself. (Geshe <http://www.fpmt.org>)

When donating of the ordinary man is without any conditions, he/she spiritually will have freer feeling. If the one does more generosity so he/she will have less property to be worry about it. So we conclude that to have a tranquil life there is no need to have more wealth and property. [31]

Second type is generosity perfection of religious doctrine (Dharma) granting or teaching to others. With teaching to others we help them to become more self-reliant. For solving immediate needs giving of properties is useful but for distance needs teaching is useful. This is not necessary to have extraordinary skill; it is only enough everyone to teach others the things in which he/she is more expert. The best teaching is teaching of religious doctrine (Dharma) since it helps people to achieve eternal happiness and freedom. [31] "Six Paramitas" www.abrc.org.au Dharma's teaching is one of the main goals of the disciples. The value of Dharma's teaching is more from giving properties because property is mortal and transient, but Dharma not only leave them from this life, but also grant them wisdom to be placed in the illumination path. (Geshe <http://www.fpmt.org>)

Third type of this perfection is granting the courage and bravery in which any fear from others whether human or animal or other things is removed from the disciple and the person achieves calm and self-esteem. [31] "Six Paramitas" www.abrc.org.au To achieve this level of perfection a the disciple requested to deny and give up the body and give it to others [8].

Fourth type of generosity perfection is giving active love. It means the disciple strongly desires to give kindness to all beings. Only with having internal love and interest we can help creatures but if the internalized love be active will have many benefits. In this way both the disciple and others will benefit. (Geshe <http://www.fpmt.org>)

The one who has generosity perfection certainly will benefit. In *Āṅguttaranikāya* it comes that "the person who gives alms, grants four things: he causes longevity, being cheerful, happiness, and strength, consequently enjoy from long life, cheerfulness,

happiness, and strength in the mass of celestials or amongst the terrestrials. [23].

Buddha has said that the the disciple who in meditation performs the perfection of generosity, does not need to give any wealth. Whatever he wants he has. All of these are because of his former merits and now he has supernatural power. This is from the benefits of the disciple's generosity perfection. Another benefit of this perfection is solving problems and numerous increasing of merits and competences. [32].

According to the Pali Canon in *Cariyapitaka Khuddaka Nikāya* one of the main effects of generosity perfection is its role in self-purification. Generosity has the feature of purification. Its role is changing greed to giving things that can be donated. This edification gets obvious in being nonattached or in attaining to a favorite state of existence. The thing's being able to be relinquished is the direct cause of that edification [7].

In all Buddhist countries offering specially food and clothing to priests is very valuable and leads decreasing someone's greed and arrogance in offering [23]. Most Buddhists everyday seeks opportunities to present something to others even if a few spoons of rice. Such a generosity feeling is common among them [24].

Generosity in the Islamic mysticism:

In Islam generosity is used with Arabic terms such as "khoms", "zakaat", "sadagah", "enfag", "joud", "sakha", and "easar". Khoms and zakaat are of religious obligatory duties. And means the obligatory giving some part of properties more than personal or family ordinary use to needy people. If a person abstain from doing this duty deserves punishment in this world and in the afterworld. Sadagah, enfag, easar, joud, sakha are recommended degrees of generosity which being considered a type of virtue and perfection and not doing them do not lead to worldly and eternal punishment. In Islamic mysticism joud and sakha are of mystical statuses of discipleship.

The first obligatory duty of generosity is "khoms". Khoms literally means one-fifth and in religious terms it means giving one-fifth of properties more than personal or family ordinary use in the way of God, and for the prophet, kinfolk, orphans, and wayfarers. (Quran 8:41) Khoms as an income source can be used to manage Islamic society. (Makarem-e Shirazi 1384 HS. 423-425).

The other obligatory duty of generosity is zakaat. This duty is emphasized in more than thirty verses of holy Quran. (see: Quran, , 2:43, 83, 110, 117, 18:81, 19:13, 30:39) Originally zakaat means growth and development as a result of God's bless in worldly and eternal things. (Ragheb Esfahani, 1412 HL. 380) Zakaat is called to God's share that a faithful Muslim brings out from his/her wealth and give it to a poor. For this reason in payment of zakaat

there is the hope of growth and wealth increasing beside of charity and blessing or it leads the soul purification of the payer or both of them, because zakaat has both of these benefits. (RaghebEsfahani1412 HL.382)Zakaat literally have two meanings: firstly growth and developments, and secondly purity.(Ibn-e Mandzur1414 HL. 14:358)In general meaning everything has zakaat. Imam Ali says: “the zakaat of body is fight[with oppressors] (jihad) and fast, the zakaat of dignity and authority is munificence, the zakaat of beauty is chastity. The zakaat of domination and power is rescue of distressed people, the zakaat of courage is jihad in the way of God, the zakaat of health is attempts to obey the God, the zakaat of victory is beneficence, the zakaat of science is its spread [worldwide] ..., and the zakaat of power is justice. (Mohaddeth-e Noori1408 HL. 7:46)

The upper level of generosity is almsgiving or sadagah. Sadagah is from the root of “sedg” with the meaning of truth. It is named sadagah because it shows the truth of almsgiver. Sadagah is called to a thing that a person to access to God separates from his property and pays in the way God. sadagah usually used for an action that people do it willingly. (RaghebEsfahani, 480)God says “indeed alms are for poor”. (Quran, 9:60)sadagah not only is giving wealth but also includes spiritual generosity, as holy prophet said that “every goodness is sadagah”. (Koleini1407 HL. 4:26)

The more general term that encompasses the sadagah too is enfag. Enfag is from the root of “nafag” with the meaning of exit.(RaghebEsfahani, 819)Enfag means one’s removing the property from his possession. (Al-Askari, 167) In religious terms enfag means bringing out and giving the property in the way of God (Quran2:264) and for the satisfaction of God (Quran2:274).

Beside of the mentioned concepts, in Islamic mystical texts the terms joud, sakha, and easar are of mystical statuses that from different aspects they have conceptual overlap, but yet they are independent concepts and specify different dimensions of internal meaning of generosity.

Joud means offering without any expectation. This offering is voluntarily and willingly. (As-Solami, 1414 HS. 171, As-Solami, 1369 HS. 1:482) Its opposite is Bokhl. (Ibn-e Ma’az al-Razi 1423 HL. 155) It is called that joud means the disciple gives more of his property and remain less of his it. (Ibn-e Abu Bakr al-Razi 1422 HL. 149)

Sakha means the instinct which invites the human to munificence. Its opposite is scarcity (Shohh). (Ibn-e Ma’az al-Razi 1423 HL.155) It is also said that sakha means the disciple knows his brothers and sisters prior to himself in the world or afterworld issues. (As-Solami1414 HS.330) God praises the bounteous since “they give food, for the love of Him, to the needy...” (Quran: 76:8)

The others have said that sakha means giving before someone’s requesting or the disciple donates willingly and does no greed to others’ property. It is narrated from Imam Ali that sakha means not voiding freewill offering with reproach. (As-Solami1414 HS. 333-34) In the statements of religious leaders sakha has high position in Islam and Islamic mysticism. (see: Al-Imam-os-Sadeg1400 HL. 82-84; As-Solami1414 HS. 331-37) Some people believe that joud and sakha have the same meaning. (Ibn-e Abu Bakr al-Razi1422 HL. 149) but often, they know the joud more perfect than sakha because it is mostly done voluntarily and willingly, but sakha is sometimes done involuntarily and unwillingly. joud involves both needy and not needy but sakha only involves needy and in comparison with joud it is like a water runnel compared with a river. (As-Solami1369 HS. 1:482, As-Solami1414 HS. 171) According to mentioned texts, the objects of joud and sakha are objective things such as food, clothing, housing, and other properties even a slice of bread with the condition of being for the sake of God’s satisfaction and being in the way of God. (Al-Imam-os-Sadeg1400 HL. 82-84)

Easar is the upmost level of generosity and means preferring others to oneself and giving authority to others, even if it is done unwillingly, legally it is acceptable (Quran 59:9), but in mystical path doing of easar willingly is more pleasant and more acceptable. (KhajeAbdollah-e Ansari, 75)

There are three levels and stages for easar. The first stage is preferring of others to oneself in properties, businesses, and other profits with three conditions: firstly not being illegally work, secondly not preventing the doer from discipleship path towards God, and thirdly not wasting the human time. (KhajeAbdollah-e Ansari1417 HL. 76; At-Talamsani1371 HS. 249-251; Kashani1385 HS. 386-388) For that reason God says: “do not give all properties and having”. (Quran 8:29) The second stage is that the disciple prefers satisfaction of God than others’ however it is painful for him and he gives his life and property. The third stage of easar is the sacrificing of God. In this status the disciple knows his easar not a deed of himself but as a deed of God because when he gives property to others he knows that the real owner of that property is God and also the God is the real sacrificer. Finally, the disciple gets absorbed in The Truth in a way that observes none of his or her sacrifice and this is the time that the disciple destroys his features and attains to the status of self-perishing in God (fanafillah). (KhajeAbdollah-e Ansari1417 HL.76; At-Talamsani1371 HS. 251-253; Kashani1385 HS. 389-392)

Conclusion:

As it was mentioned in the present study, in both religions the generosity is considered as a virtue or perfection. It is a significant status in both mystical

discipleship and has different levels. In Islam the levels of generosity are proposed by different concepts. It can be said that the concepts khoms and zakaat do not have equivalent in Buddhism, but the concepts sadagah, enfagin Islam are similar to the beginners' level of generosity; sakha is similar to the intermediate level, and joud is similar to the supernatural generosity or the saint disciples generosity in Buddhism. The three levels of easar status have matching coordination with three levels of Buddhist generosity perfection.

According to object of generosity, in both Islamic and Buddhist mysticism beside of objective properties giving, spiritual donating and life bestowing too are under the generosity doctrine. Donating of merits and practical possibility of such donating is only in Buddhist mystical custom.

Studying and surveying of generosity perfection according to emptiness (Skt. Śūnyatā, Pal. suññatā) doctrine in Buddhist mysticism indicated that in emptiness state, the disciple has no perception of granted person, doer of giving action, the and giving action itself, and in fact all of them are mortal and transient. In Islamic mysticism the disciple experiences such a similar state in third level of easar stage degrees, and its essential condition is experiencing of self-perishing status in God, in which the mystic is not aware of any perception of himself and his actions and gets absorbed in God.

In generosity studying of these two domains, two important differences observed. In Islamic mysticism in all stages and levels of generosity the God is the aim of the disciple whether being in the level of doing obligatory duties or being in the state of the beginners, or the intermediate, or the saint disciples. But in Buddhist mysticism there is nothing about God and only the disciple's own states is considered.

The other difference is that in Buddhist mysticism there is no condition or limitation for generosity but Islamic mysticism has certain conditions and limitations in all stages and levels. Some of acceptable generosity types in Buddhist mysticism such as life bestowing to rescue an animal are not acceptable in Islam. Because such a life bestowing is not easar in Islamic meaning, since the easar of life bestowing is for a superior aim, not for an undermost aim, and because human life is superior to animal life, in such cases saving human life is essential. But in Buddhist mysticism since it is imagined that all the objects have the same reality and rescuing everybody depends on the general rescuing of all the live creatures, so such a life bestowing not only has no difference with rescuing sublime aim, but also is a virtue along with that.

Consequently it can be said that the view of Buddhist mysticism to generosity is quite idealistic, but the view of Islam about this category is from realism to idealism beside of caution and moderation. Any way, both of these mystical domains invited

humans to devotion and generosity in the highest extreme of humanity.

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